

## Idaho State alumni find rewards in returning for more education

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Three years ago, Jamie Denning, her Idaho State University bachelor's degree in ecology in hand, moved to Boise hoping to find work with an environmental assessment business.

Instead, she found an economic slump, and few prospects in her field. But Denning had worked in medical offices while earning her undergraduate degree, and soon came to a conclusion: There would always be work in health care.

So like many ISU alumni who have returned this year to pursue additional degrees, Denning, 27, enrolled again last January to retool for a changing economy. This time, she entered ISU's new Boise "fast-track" nursing program, a rigorous, four-semester curriculum that leads to a bachelor's degree – and, Denning hopes, job security.

"Being a nurse, you can get a job anywhere, anytime," she says. Without the opportunity to shift career goals by earning an additional degree relatively quickly, "I don't know what I would have done."

Repeat business is good business, and ISU is getting its share. According to the Office of Registration and Records, of the 12,751 students who were pre-registered for the fall semester as of Aug. 11, more than 12 percent – 1,599 – were alumni returning for more.

McCammon Mayor Ken Bullock, 52, understands their motivations. He was the first of five children to earn a college degree, a bachelor's in business administration at ISU in 1978. Then came the economic downturn of the '80s, which hit Idaho hard.

"In order to really look to the future to maintain a lifestyle and prepare for a retirement, I knew I had to make an adjustment," he recalls.

He didn't want to uproot his family and move. They had a good life in McCammon, where he's been at the helm for 10 years. That meant doing more than just freshening up his resume. It meant turning again to ISU, about 30 miles to the north.

He began hitting the books again in 1990. In 1995 he left with not one but two additional bachelor's degrees, in accounting and computer information systems.

"It really has changed my life and career, to be able to do that without having to move or disrupt our lifestyle," he says. "I'd hate to think where I'd have been without that additional education." What's more, he adds, he graduated his degrees debt free.

Ambition, a changing economy and job market, even changes in one's personal life can require new credentials, knowledge and skills, say those who've had to readjust. Being able to return to ISU, they add, has been key.

"It's up to the person's ability to change," says Idaho Falls resident Anne Sneed, 52, "but ISU has provided me a lot of tools that have enabled me to do that."

The Idaho Falls resident, a single parent of four with a teenager still at home, earned a bachelor's degree in business management at ISU in 1994. Today, she works for the company that oversees operations at the Idaho National and Engineering Laboratory, BBWI, helping to manage employee-education opportunities it offers through ISU and the University of Idaho.

She will complete work on an MBA at ISU in December. She took most of her coursework at Idaho Falls' University Place, a riverside campus separated by 50 miles of desert and farmland from the main campus in Pocatello.

"We're in a very changing business environment, not only at INEEL but in the economy as a whole," says Sneed. "We have to have a broad range of skills to adapt."

Better-educated employees are a benefit to the company, she says. So BBWI has a degree program allows an employee to reduce work hours to part time and still retain benefits. The program covers the cost of books and fees as well. In exchange, the employee commits to five years' service with the company.

Sneed's daughter, Pocatello resident April Whaley, 26, also has a bachelor's from ISU (psychology, '01). Like mom, she's on track for an ISU master's, in experimental psychology, by spring.



**Anne Sneed, left, and her daughter, April Whaley, have returned to Idaho State University to pursue master's degrees after earning bachelor's degrees at ISU.**

Also like her mother, Whaley works at the INEEL. She's in a graduate fellowship program that she learned of through ISU's psychology department. The fellowship is helping to pay her tuition.

Whaley says the quality of her undergraduate experience was a factor in her decision to return to ISU for an advanced degree.

"I thought the faculty and the program that I was in, the psychology program, were pretty incredible," she says. "They had high standards, and I thought that they challenged me to step up and do good work."

Results of ISU's graduating-student survey for the 2002-2003 academic year suggest that Whaley isn't alone. More than a quarter of those who earned certificates and degrees that year responded to the survey. The results: 85 percent of respondents agreed or agreed strongly that the quality of education in their major field was "excellent."

Karleen Lynes, 36, earned her ISU bachelor's degree in 2001 with a double major in human resource training development, and professional technical education, after coursework at University Place.

This fall Lynes is one of 56 first-year applicants out of more than 500 who were admitted to the College of Pharmacy's doctor of pharmacy program.

She recently moved from Rigby, in Jefferson County, south to Pocatello for the four-year task.

“On a personal level,” she says of ISU’s role in her life, “it means I have opportunities that will benefit me and my family for generations to come.”

Her positive undergraduate experience influenced her decision to return. “That,” she says, “coupled with the fact that the ISU College of Pharmacy is one of the top schools of pharmacy in the country.”

Tina Rhoads, interim director of The College of Technology’s Center for New Directions, says students who return for more education after years in the work force are focused, and that they re-enroll with a purpose. “They want to be more employable,” she says.

Additional education, Sneed advises, can help one achieve security in life. “The only security we have,” she says, “is what we create with our own skills and abilities.”

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